Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of FIAE is loaded full of reasons why differentiated instruction is the best choice for both students and teachers. It tells that right from the beginning, teachers should use DI within their classrooms, possibly even setting up the classroom to reflect the groups or levels of learning. Personally, I feel like this is a bad idea because these students will stick out, and while other students may not notice or care, those students most likely will. And the goal is to help students learn, and they cannot do so in an uncomfortable environment. Yet, I do agree that from day one DI should be used. It also argues against the idea that DI may get students believing that they will always have differentiated options in their lives. Wormeli says that the world is differentiated, and that the students, once they become adults, will begin to choose the options and search out the way that works best for them. This is important to me because as a teacher, especially a history teacher, I will have all kinds of students at all different levels, since a lot of history classes are not separated by ability like English and math classes are. My classroom will have to have DI within it in order for all of my students to be successful. I will need to give them opportunities for more help, alternative assignments, etc. And while standardized tests, such as the SAT, are not differentiated in any way, differentiated instruction helps then learn what is on these tests in their own way, but they are still learning the subject matter that they will be tested on. This is extremely important for me since my dream is to teach in an AP classroom environment, where students will be taking a standardized test in order to gain college credit, unlike most social studies classes where there is no standardized test to study for.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of FIAE discusses mastery and what true understanding is, means, and how it looks. I thoroughly enjoyed the quote on page 11 by Ben Franklin, “Tim was so learned, that he could name a horse in nine languages; so ignorant, that he bought a cow to ride on.” Mastery is the ability to use the knowledge in a realistic application. A student must be able to spot a situation or an opportunity where the knowledge can be applied and then have the ability to apply it. This is where the six facets come into play, if a student can use all six facets, they have mastered the subject. On page 13 a diagram (figure 2.1) lays out what mastery is and what mastery is not, that way a teacher can understand if their student truly has a grasp on the information or not. This would be a good go-to chart for when a teacher isn’t totally sure about a student’s progress. Within my subject, mastery would be identified through mostly the identification of cause and effect situations, what caused a historic even to happen, and what its effects were. These would usually be seen in presentations and essays within classes; I hope to be able to identify mastery though different ways that way student’s do not feel as if they are stuck because of the format of delivery instead of mastery of the info. This chapter also encourages schools to identify what they consider mastery to be as well as how it will be evaluated, since if there is not an equal idea on what mastery is throughout the school, there will be no consistency throughout the students general education.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of FIAE focuses largely on assessment, and discusses many different kinds of assessment and ways to assess, as well as rules to how to assess properly. Wormeli strongly suggests pre-assessment, just as the other books have. We need to test our students to see what they know and already understand, as well as what they have difficulty with, that way we can see what matters the most. I believe a good way for me to use this in my classroom in the beginning of the year is to give students a pre-assessment test, simply a multiple choice test where I ask them general questions about the largest parts of history. These students have been learning U.S. history for 9 or more years, and some of it they have mastered by now. This way I can focus lightly on the mastered events, and focus more deeply on the things that students can’t help but forget. In order to make it not as boring, I can let them do this assignment in another way if they wish, and I will give them credit not on how well they did, but on attempting the assignment. That way the students do not feel as if they have simply been wasting their time and they have nothing to show for it. It would not be a long test, because as Wormeli suggests, pre-assessments should be short. It would just be over general ideas, and then I could give smaller pre-assessments that work along the same lines before each unit. This will be especially helpful my first year, since I won’t know how long certain subjects will take, and I can set more time aside for the subjects that it seems students haven’t yet grasped.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of FIAE discusses the different kinds of assessment. The first discussed is portfolios and how beneficial they are in assessment. The student and the teacher can both see the growth over time, and the development of the student throughout the year. I liked having portfolios in my writing classes because it was easy to just print off all of my work, but in other classes I hated making portfolios. The book also suggests sending the portfolios home at least once during each grading period, which I think is a great idea. Sending a portfolio home with a student's report card would be very beneficial, because then the parent(s) can truly see the progress of the student and what they need to work on, as well as witness the reason for the students grade. I will consider doing this in my class, and having the students hold on to their papers, projects, and homework’s to bring home and show the family.

Chapter 4 also goes into rubrics, which are something that all students are accustomed to. Rubrics are everywhere starting at elementary school and going all the way up to the college level, so I will for sure be using rubrics that way students can see what they did good and needed to work on to improve. I feel like rubrics aren't as personal as conversations though, and also not as explanatory, so I will probably have conversations with the groups or the students to go over the rubrics after major projects.

Chapter 5

This chapter was very exciting for me because I have been thinking about this a lot as we have been reading about assessments. How do I manage to “tier” the work and assessments so that my students can honestly be successful and grow? All students need to be challenged a little or else they cannot grow. How do I challenge students enough and not too much? And how do I manage the different levels of challenge needed by the different students? Tiering helps meet the needs of students who are not ready yet, who aren’t interested, or who have trouble because of their learning styles. “Ratcheting,” which is what I have been thinking mostly about, is when you adjust solely because of a student’s readiness level, and not their interests or learning styles. The list on page 57 and 58 was very interesting to me because it gave ideas on how to challenge a student further, and since I plan on going into Gifted & Talented education, that was really important and stuck out a lot to me.

A suggestion that Wormeli gives is a learning contract. In a learning contract students get to move at their own pace, and simply check off the things they have already completed. I feel like this is good for some students but not all. A lot of students lack the ambition to continue going on without the full guidance that traditional teaching gives. I believe giving some students the option would be good, but you always need to make sure they are actually pushing themselves and focusing on the work at hand. This is something I may use in my classroom, if we get stuck in a rut.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of FIAE focuses on test questions and how to make a good test that actually assesses the student’s ability and not their ability to fulfill the teacher’s ideas of what is right. It argues not to use multiple choice questions because you are forcing the students to choose an answer instead of using their own thoughts. I feel like a lot of students like multiple choice because it takes the stress off, and that when students would prefer a multiple choice test they should be given one, it should just be modified. A good way to give them the opportunity to write what they think is a better answer is to give them another option where they can fill it in. Wormeli goes on to encourage short answers, essay questions, and drawing out formulas and diagrams. I feel like if a test is all essays and short answers, even now that I am in college, I get overwhelmed and it negatively affects my performance, especially if the test is timed, such as the finals. Long tests are exhausting and stop students from working at their full potential. I plan on giving short tests, when I give them, which are focused and simple to understand. My goal is to see what my students have learned, not to see how good they are at answering my confusing test and reading my mind. I don’t plan on giving that many tests in my classes, because I believe that tests ignore too many of the learning styles and so some students, such as verbal/linguistic students, have an upper hand on the assessment. I plan on giving students multiple options on how to prove their understanding of the subject.

Chapter 6,7,8,9

I would love to be a teacher who did not give out grades. But I plan to be a public school teacher, and with that said, it’s pretty much guaranteed that I will have to provide grades both for the school and for the parents. Parents are so used to getting grades, and having those grades mean something, when really grades don't mean anything. Yet grades still make students, at least those that get good ones, feel accomplished. I know that is how I always felt. But I do agree that grades are kind of arbitrary, who says that a C is average? I know that when I brought home a C, my parents didn't think I was doing well in school. They wanted B's and A's. And who says that a student deserves a C and not a B? Maybe they tried incredibly hard on that essay, they did four or five drafts, but they have lots of problems happening at home and can't keep their mind straight or focused? How can I still give my students grades without it being arbitrary and meaningless?

I have mixed feelings on extra credit assignments. I know when I was in high school, extra credit was my savoir. Without it, I would have failed my math classes, which I almost did anyways. I can see, however, the idea behind not giving extra credit. It isn't fair to the rest of the students that one that wasn't doing so great got to boost their grade, while the rest did not because their grade was "good enough." I believe that if a student tries really hard but just cannot seem to grasp it, they should have another option. Instead of giving them the opportunity to do extra credit, or to redo the assignment, maybe giving them another assignment that would take its place, but that still emphasizes the skills needed to be mastered. I honestly don't know what I will do in my classroom, but this will probably be it.

I am definitely against giving a percentage of grades for participation. A lot of my teachers—and even professors—have done this in the classes I have taken. Personally, I think it is a horrible way of manipulating students. A student should want to raise their hand because they are comfortable and believe in their answer, not because they want to make sure they get those 10 or 15 points of their grade. I will not be grading participation in my classrooms at all. But I do feel like grading effort, another thing that Wormeli warns us about, is something that I will do. I believe that students who try really hard and make multiple attempts deserve credit for their trials. I was a student who tried very hard, particularly in math, and still could never quite get it. I do plan on grading on effort in my classroom. Of course, I don’t know how I would do this, because it could be a slippery slope.